Stephen Reeves 9/8/10

Writing 105

“Reassigning Meaning”

By Simi Lipton

“The Disabled community has attempted to wrest control of the language from the previous owners, and reassign meaning to the terminology used to describe disability and disabled people.” (223)

The disabled community wants to change the meaning of the word disabilities in order to better describe disabled people.

“*Ableism* has recently landed in the *Reader’s Digest Oxford Wordfinder* (Tulloch 1993), where it is defined as ‘discrimination in favor of the able-bodied.’ I would add, extrapolating from the definitions of racism and sexism, that ableism also includes the idea that a person’s ability or characteristics are determined by disability or that people with disabilities as a group are inferior to nondisabled people.” (223)

Words to describe people with disabilities have become more and more negative, thus making them similar to sexism and racism.

“Over the past century the term *disabled* and others such as *handicapped* and the less inclusive term *cripple*, have emerged as collective nouns that convey the idea that there is something that links this disparate group of people.” (223-224)

The terms disabled, handicapped, and crippled cover a very broad spectrum of people, Lipton argues that people should try and find a way to describe disabled people that is more specific. Currently these terms are just the most convenient for today’s society.

“While retaining the term *disability*, despite its medical origins, a premise of most of the literature in disability studies is that *disability* is best understood as a marker of identity.” (225)

Instead of the term disability being a secondary characteristic it has become a “marker of identity.”

“Rather than maintaining disability as a secondary characteristic, disabled has become a marker of the identity that the individual and group wish to highlight and call attention to.” (225-226)

Similar to the quote above, Lipton wanted to reiterate the point that disabilities are being augmented by society.

“If we, as a society, place the onus on individuals with disabilities to work harder to ‘compensate’ for their disabilities or to ‘overcome’ their condition or the barriers in the environment, we have no need for civil rights legislation or affirmative action.” (229)

According to Lipton, people with disabilities need to be represented politically in order to get the same opportunities women and African Americans get every day.

“When disabled people are able to pass for nondisabled, and do, the emotional toll it takes is enormous.” (229)

Society has trouble accepting people with disabilities and in order to fit in people with minor disabilities will try to hide it from their peers.

“…disabled people are rarely depicted on television, in films, or in fiction as being in control of their own lives—in charge or actively seeking out and obtaining what they want and need.” (232)

Due to messages sent through T.V shows and other media, the disabled often appear weaker and less independent than people without disabilities. Due to this society has learned to pity the disabled.

“The use of the term *victim*, a word typically used in the context of criminal acts, evokes the relationship between perpetrator and victim. Using this language attributes life, power, and intention to the condition and disempowers the person with the disability, rendering him or her helpless and passive.” (232)

When people use victim to describe someone with disabilities it diminishes that person’s efforts to “pass” their disabilities.

Talking about injured Canadian soldiers “’…If they transgressed any rule...they’d take their wheelchairs away from them and leave them in bed for two weeks.’” (233)

This is an example where people with disabilities were punished by taking advantage of their disabilities and taking away something that is vital for everyday life.